الصوم في يوم عاشوراء

Fasting *on the* Day *of* ‘Āshūrā’

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1441 / 2019

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The people of knowledge have differed with regard to the fast of 'Āshūrā', and the various opinions can be divided into four schools:

The First Opinion

The fasting on the Day of 'Āshūrā' is an Abrahamic practice, established by Prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ as a practice for all subsequent people. It is for this reason that the people of *Jāhiliyyah* from amongst the Arabs used to fast it, and that the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, would also fast with them.

The Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, continued to fast on the Day of 'Āshūrā' until Allāh ﷻ revealed the obligation of fasting the month of Ramaḍān, whereupon the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, stopped fasting the Day of 'Āshūrā' as an obligatory fast; thus its fast then became a voluntary act instead.

This understanding has been transmitted on the authority of 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar, the Mother of the Believers 'Ā'ishah, and al-Rubayyi' bt. Mu'awwadh al-Anṣārī رضي الله عنهم.[1]

The Second Opinion

When the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, migrated to Madīnah, he found that the Jews who were living there fasted on the Day of 'Āshūrā', claiming that it was the day on which Allāh ﷻ saved Mūsā ﷺ and his people from Pharaoh and his army.

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[1] For example, as 'Ā'ishah narrates, "the Quraysh used to fast on the day of 'Āshūrā' in the pre-Islāmic period (*Jāhiliyyah*). Then, Allāh's Messenger ﷺ ordered [the Muslims] to fast on it until the fasting in the month of Ramaḍān was prescribed, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ said, 'he who wants to fast [on 'Āshūrā'] may fast, and he who does not want to may not fast'" (Bukhārī, Book 30, *ḥadīth* 3).

So, the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said, "we have more right to Mūsā than them," and he ordered the fast on that day.

This understanding has been transmitted on the authority of ʿAbdullāh b. al-ʿAbbās ﵄.[2]

The Third Opinion

Fasting on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ was never an obligation at any point, but it is instead a possible supererogatory act, and one upon which certain members of the Umayyad dynasty fasted and encouraged others to fast.

The Fourth Opinion

The Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, never fasted on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ except in the final year of his honorable life.

Ibn al-ʿAbbās ﵄ narrates, "when the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ fasted on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ and he ordered that the fast be observed that day by others, they said, 'O Messenger of Allāh, is it not [also] a day that the Jews and Christians deem sacred?'"

The Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, said, "if it is [written for me to be here] next year, we shall fast the ninth day [as well]—if Allāh Wills."

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[2] Ibn al-ʿAbbās ﵄ narrates, "When the Prophet ﷺ arrived in Madīnah, he found (the Jews) fasting on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ (i.e., the tenth of Muḥarram). They used to say, 'this is a great day on which Allāh saved Moses and drowned the folk of Pharaoh. Moses observed the fast on this day as a sign of gratitude to Allāh.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'I am closer to Moses than they.' So, he ﷺ observed the fast (on that day) and ordered the Muslims to fast on it" (Bukhārī, Book 55, *ḥadīth* 609).

Ibn al-ʿAbbās ﷺ narrates, "that next year never came [for the Prophet], for the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) passed away [before it—in Rabīʿ al-Awwal]."

Al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī, in *Kitāb al-Umm*, and al-Bayhaqī have opined that the strongest position is that the fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ was never made an obligatory fast at any point, and that it was rather a supererogatory act for whomsoever wished to observe it.

Conclusion

The fourth opinion, which is the latter-noted opinion of Ibn al-ʿAbbās ﷺ, is the strongest position to me. It states that the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, never fasted the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ except for once, and that he intended to add fasting on the ninth day [of Muḥarram] to it in the following year. However, Allāh ﷻ took him [i.e., his soul] unto Himself before he was able to do that.

What I understand from this action of the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, is this that one of the Angels of Allāh informed the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, that his [grand]son al-Ḥusayn ﷺ would be killed in a state of immense thirst on that day [i.e., ʿĀshūrāʾ]. This is known through the *ḥadīth* of Anas b. Mālik ﷺ, narrated by Aḥmad (13,563) and Ibn Ḥibbān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (6,742), under the [chapter] title, "The Accounts Regarding the Martyrdom of the Grandson of al-Muṣṭafā, Peace be upon Him":

> On the authority of Anas b. Mālik ﷺ, who said, "the Angel of Rain sought permission from his Lord to pay a visit to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), and the permission was granted.

> That day happened to be the day of Umm Salamah [i.e., the day the Prophet would be at her home], so the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said [to her], "keep the door [to my room] closed, and don't let anyone enter." So, she kept watch on the door until al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī came in, successfully got past her [without her noticing], opened the door, and entered.
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> He ran in and jumped on the back of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family), and the Prophet began to hug and kiss him. Then the Angel of Rain said to him [i.e., the Prophet], "do you love him?"
>
> He (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) said, "yes!"
>
> The Angel said, "I must inform you that your Nation [i.e., *ummah*] will kill him! Would you like for me to show you the place wherein he will be killed?"
>
> He replied, "yes!"
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> So, the Angel took a fistful [of soil] from the land in which al-Ḥusayn would be killed and he showed it to him. The dirt was red. Umm Salamah took it and always kept it in her clothes.

It is through this *ḥadīth*, which is the most authentic narration foretelling the historical event of Karbalāʾ, that we come to understand the underlying secret behind fasting on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ. We also understand an underlying reason for Umm Salamah's love for al-Ḥusayn, her deep grief over his tragic death, and her continuous stands alongside the Ahl al-Bayt of the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, against the camps of their enemies.

The Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, was deeply aggrieved when informed of this by his angelic guest.

Therefore, when the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ came, the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, observed a fast out of sadness and pain for the thirst of al-Ḥusayn ؑ, his family, and his companions.

When it was revealed to him that the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn ؑ would take place over the two days—the ninth and tenth of Muḥarram—he vowed to fast the ninth day as well; and when he observed this fast, he did so without informing the people with regard to the actual reason for it. Perhaps this was because he did not want to entrench in their minds the idea that the issue of al-Ḥusayn's ؑ martyrdom was an unavoidable/inevitable occurrence that was predestined by Allāh (which would have reinforced the incorrect notion of *jabr*, or fatalism) to the extent that they wouldn't care about it. Perhaps.

I encourage all to observe fasts during the entire duration of Allāh's ﷻ sacred month, al-Muḥarram. If you are unable to do that, then fast on the two days of sadness—the ninth and the tenth—of al-Muḥarram.

Not because the fasting on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ is a practice from the Days of Ignorance! And not because we are closer and have more right over Mūsā ؑ than the Banū Isrāʾīl.

But rather to remember the thirst of al-Ḥusayn ؑ, and the tragedy of his martyrdom, over those two days during which the greatest forms of patience and perseverance were made manifest.

Allāh Knows Best, and all Praise is Due to Him, the Lord of the Worlds.

al-Shaykh al-Sayyid al-ʿAllāmah Muḥaddith al-ʿItrah
ʿADĀB AL-ḤAMSH AL-ḤUSAYNĪ
(may Allāh ﷻ preserve him)

Comments from the Translator

After examining the four major opinions and their evidences, we can determine a few things:

- There is no unanimous understanding on whether the fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ was, at one point, obligatory or whether it was always recommended. Scholars of jurisprudence have also always been in disagreement over this issue, some viewing it as having been an obligatory fast at one point, only for that obligation to be abrogated by the obligation of fasting the month of Ramaḍān, whereby the fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ became a recommended act. Others viewed it as never having been obligatory, and that it was always simply a recommended act.
- The history and origin of the fast is also not agreed upon, even according to reports attributed to the Noble Companions. We have conflicting reports wherein certain individuals, such as Sayyidah ʿĀʾishah, narrate that the fast was a practice of the Age of Ignorance and observed by the Prophet ﷺ in Makkah; however, we have Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ narrating that the fast was only observed by the Prophet after he entered Madīnah and found the Jews fasting in celebration of the Exodus of Prophet Mūsā ؑ. These two narratives related to the fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ are so vastly different as to conflict with each other.
- A second opinion, attributed to Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ, suggests that the fast was only observed by the Prophet ﷺ in his final year before passing, and that it was not done for any of the above-mentioned reasons; although the event of the Jews fasting in Madīnah on the very same day was something that was made mention of by Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ when he found the Prophet ﷺ fasting, the Prophet ﷺ did not acknowledge their action

> as legitimate, nor did he imply that he was fasting for the same reason—as indicated by his response: "next year, I will fast the ninth [of Muḥarram] as well, if I see it." Ibn al-ʿAbbās tells us that the Prophet passed away a few months later and did not see the following year. It seems here, then, that the Prophet ﷺ fasted for a reason other than the Jews'. To further emphasize that distinction, he expressed the intention to fast additionally on the preceding day in the following year. It was a matter of coincidence that the Jews happened to be fasting on the same day, due to which Ibn al-ʿAbbās brought it up. We know that the two days—the ninth and tenth—were both days of thirst for Imām al-Ḥusayn, whereas the reason for the Jews fasting in Madīnah had nothing to do with the ninth of Muḥarram.

Considering that there are three conflicting reports on the issue, it would serve us well to take a bit of a closer look at these narratives—and why one would suggest that the latter opinion of Ibn al-ʿAbbās is the most consistent and seemingly accurate of the three.

The Narrative of the Fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ being a Practice of the Arabs in the Age of Ignorance

The primary transmitter of this narrative is Sayyidah ʿĀ'ishah bt. Abī Bakr, who did not witness the Age of Ignorance, nor was she old enough during Makkan phase of Islām to be a witness to the fast of ʿĀshūrā'. Her transmission here is among the *mursal* (loosely transmitted reports) of the Ṣaḥābah.

A *mursal* report in *ḥadīth* literature is one in which the narrator narrates an event that they are known not to have witnessed (i.e., due to date discrepancies, generational discrepancies, etc.) without mentioning their direct source for the

account. Typically, *mursal* narrations are regarded as weak and cannot be used for substantiation as proof-texts. However, exceptions have been made by scholars of *ḥadīth* for the *mursal* reports of the Ṣaḥābah. In other words, if a Companion is known to have not been present at a particular occasion, but nevertheless narrates a *ḥadīth* regarding events that took place during that occasion without mentioning their direct source for the information that they were not otherwise privy to, it is regarded as a *mursal* of a Ṣaḥābī and accepted according to many. The scholars would say that it has the *ḥukm* (ruling) of *rafʿ* (being raised as an attribution to the Prophet ﷺ). This concept of such acceptance has been contested within *ḥadīth* scholarship; at the very least, we can say that if there are conflicting (irreconcilably so) narratives of an account through *aḥādīth* that are all seemingly authentic, but one or more are through the *mursal* transmission of Companions, then it would behoove one to prefer the account that is *not* a *mursal* transmission as the strongest report and opinion on the matter. This particular narrative is also directly contradictory to the narrative of Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ, which makes no mention of the practice being one of the Age of Ignorance, thus making it completely unrelated to the Makkan society or its polytheists.

The Narrative of the Fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ being a Practice of the Jews of Madīnah that the Prophet ﷺ adopted upon Arriving to Madīnah

The primary transmitter of this narrative is ʿAbdullāh b. al-ʿAbbās ؓ; however, there are also reports of the same account from Abū Hurayrah, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, and Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān.

As for the narration of Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ, he was born only two years before the migration to Madīnah. His father, al-ʿAbbās ؓ, did not move to Madīnah until much later and was known as one of "final immigrants" despite having professed

his Islām long before then. Therefore, Ibn al-ʿAbbās ﷺ could not have been more than three or four years old when this event would have occurred, nor would he have been present in Madīnah at the time—he was still living in Makkah with his family. This narrative that is attributed to him is, therefore, another that is transmitted through the *mursal* of a Ṣaḥābī.

As for the narration of Abū Hurayrah, he only became a Muslim in the ninth year after the migration to Madīnah; his report is thus another *mursal* of a Ṣaḥābī.

As for the narration of Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, he only became a Muslim in sixth year after the migration to Madīnah; his report (if authentic) is, therefore, yet another *mursal* of a Ṣaḥābī.

Last is the narration of Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān. He and his family are known not to have entered Islām until the Conquest of Makkah, which took place in the eighth year after the migration.

All of these *aḥādīth* that report the narrative of the Prophet ﷺ fasting ʿĀshūrāʾ upon his arrival to Madīnah and finding the Jews there doing so are attributed to Companions who could not have been present to directly witness such an event, based on what we have briefly mentioned. That is not to say that we do not trust their transmission, even if it be *mursal*, but that in the circumstance in which there are conflicting reports regarding the same issue, we would prefer an attribution that is more consistent and not *mursal*.

Issues regarding consistency also include that of history and Jewish holidays. Some points regarding that include that the Jews fast on Yom Kippur, not during the Passover festival. The Passover festival is the one that is observed by the Jews for the reason mentioned in the *ḥadīth* (i.e., the Exodus), and it is celebrated on the 15th of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar. It is actually a longer event, lasting for eight days,

not just one—and there is not fasting involved. Therefore, the claim that the Jews were fasting for that reason is questionable.

Moreover, Yom Kippur is celebrated on the tenth day of Tishri in the Hebrew calendar, which is commemorated as the day that Mūsā ﷵ, on Mount Sinai, requested that Allāh expiate the sins of his community. This is the day on which the Jews fast, but the *ḥadīth* is obviously not in reference to this occasion or historical event, referring instead to the Exodus.

Some mathematicians even claim that the earliest point at which the tenth of Muḥarram and Yom Kippur coincided was 28 AH.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ arrived in Madīnah on the 12th of Rabīʿ al-Awwal—two months and two days after the tenth of Muḥarram. It is therefore odd that the narration seems to allude to the Prophet ﷺ, upon his arrival to Madīnah, seeing the Jews fasting on ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Saqqāf al-Shāfiʿī said, "we do not find any evidence to prove that the Jews used to fast or hold a festival on the tenth of Muḥarram. There is no written historical evidence to suggest this. On the contrary, they used to fast on the tenth of Tishri."

The Narrative of the Fast of ʿĀshūrāʾ being an Act Performed by the Prophet ﷺ in his Final Year

This is the second narrative attributed to Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ, which appears more consistent and aligned with his dates than the former opinion. If this fast was observed in the final year of the Prophet, then it would mean that Ibn al-ʿAbbās ؓ would have already migrated with his family to Madīnah and he would have already been of an age at which he could discern the fast of the Prophet ﷺ from that of the

Jews, and to express it openly. This is the one narrative that is attributed to a Companion who narrated it in a non-*mursal* way, i.e., he directly witnessed the event and narrated the account as per his own dialogue with the Prophet ﷺ.

I do acknowledge the correlation between the story of Mūsā ﷺ and that of Imām al-Ḥusayn ﷺ, and I respect those who make that "correlation" if they are to take the narrative of the Exodus based on the *aḥādīth*. This article, however, is intended merely to highlight that there are some holes and inconsistencies in that narrative despite it being famous, widely circulated, and found in major sources of Sunnah. As we know, the history of Islām tells us about the marginalization and persecution of Ahl al-Bayt at the hands of anti-ʿĀlid Nawāṣib rulers for centuries; massacres, along with state-sponsored scholarship and the codification/crystallization of the schools of thought under corrupt government rule, have led the *ummah* to being heavily influenced and interpolated into when it comes to our *turāth*. The knowledge of this forces us to be more critical and analytical regarding our practices rather than taking them for granted and accepting them wholeheartedly without any question or concern.

Some brief examples of this in the context of fasting on ʿĀshūrāʾ, which may also provide us some insight into the third opinion cited by Sharīf ʿAdāb (regarding the fast being an Umayyad innovation), follow hereunder.

Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī said, "the first person who instituted and inaugurated celebrations on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ was Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī. He did this in the presence of ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān and a number of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ Companions and *tābiʿīn*. It was then that it was announced that remembering al-Ḥusayn ﷺ and his afflictions in sermons was forbidden [*ḥarām*]" (*al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqah*, p. 221).

Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Saqqāf al-Shāfiʿī pointed out that:

> In the book called *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote about these issues and derived the contents of his book from facts regarding political survival. One such strategy that he adopted was the logic that "the end justifies the means." According to this principle, it is permissible for political leaders to bury the event of ʿĀshūrāʾ for the sake of achieving their political aims; despite this being inconsistent with religion and acceptable moral standards, they have endeavored to extinguish the fire of ʿĀshūrāʾ and bury the event of Karbalāʾ in such a manner. It is for this same reason that they resorted to fabricating and forging *aḥādīth* and attributing them to al-Ḥusayn's ﷺ ancestor, the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Because the apparatus of governmental propaganda was not consistent, discrepancies and contradictions appeared. They forged numerous *aḥādīth* for the sake of burying the event of Karbalāʾ, but none was successful. The only thing that continued to hold and survive, against all odds, *was* the event of Karbalāʾ. The issue of considering shedding the blood of al-Ḥusayn ﷺ to be permissible (*ḥalāl*) is truly significant (*Al-Hādī Magazine*, year 7, no. 2).

Based on reports regarding the Umayyad tyrants al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf and ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān, who institutionalized the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a day of celebration and holiday in attempt to cover the tragedy of Karbalāʾ and distract the Muslim *ummah*, it is possible that they monopolized on the ambiguity surrounding the reason for why the Prophet ﷺ had fasted on that day. Using this ambiguity, they seem to have created a smokescreen of narratives that would redirect the attention of the Muslim *ummah* away from Imām al-Ḥusayn ﷺ and toward the triumphant occasion of the Exodus. For those who hold the fourth opinion, this would be a plausible reason for the existence of the other narratives related to the fast.

None of this critical analysis is intended to deny—or promote the denial of—authentic Prophetic reports. This is merely an academic study of the narratives and a presentation of the discourse surrounding an issue that merits more than one single, monolithic perspective based on the evidence.

And Allāh ﷻ the Almighty Knows Best.